CROSS-CULTURAL COMPARISONS WITH JAPAN

by Richard K. Beardsley

Introduction

Among the various social sciences, anthropology in particular came into existence mindful of comparisons and cherishing, above all, cross-cultural comparisons. Thus it comes as a surprise to find, in studies concerning Japan, that comparative studies by scholars of other social sciences probably outnumber those attempted by anthropologists. Anthropologists studying Japan seem to be either timid or uncharacteristically preoccupied with the complexities of this single society; their ventures outside Japan have been tentative and piecemeal compared with the freewheeling excursions of sociologists and economists in particular.

In this brief paper I am less concerned with reviewing all cross-cultural studies that include Japan than with looking ahead. My intention is to suggest certain guidelines and opportunities for research, especially with reference to anthropology, sociology, and social psychology. Allusions to existing studies, mainly those written in English, are made with the aim of matching what has been done with what may yet be accomplished.

Two concerns should be voiced at the outset, both of which take into account the complexity and intricacy of so highly developed a society as Japan. First, comparison of specific, limited phenomena may be made without serious trouble, but as comparison broadens to encompass major aspects of Japanese culture or society, it becomes unmanageable unless controlled by some conceptual framework. Reinhard Bendix (1967: 27) voiced similar concern in saying, "The great classics of comparative analysis have in common that they focus on one issue with reference to which they analyze materials from different countries and civilizations. Max Weber studied the secular repercussions of different religious doctrines, de Tocqueville contrasted equality in American and in French society. Fustel de Coulanges examined the religious foundation of civic unity in Greece and Rome, Henry Maine used the familial versus individual basis of contract as the criterion for analyzing ancient legal history, and so on." He next grants that appropriate frameworks or models for work which interest us today are not simple or readily acceptable. This leads to my second con-

cern, that cross-cultural study of issues important to behavioral sciences often cannot be explored adequately through library research in materials gathered usually for other purposes. Fresh investigation in the field frequently is needed to test a hypothesis or refine it to the point of being cross-culturally testable. Such a drift away from library studies was noted over a decade ago by Oscar Lewis (1955), whose survey of 248 "writings" of comparative nature[1] showed that two-thirds of the total involved original fieldwork.

These comments on conceptual framework, models, issues, and testable hypotheses bespeak a climate of thought very different from that two decades ago, at least in anthropology. Anthropologists were then concerned with culture patterns more than with social systems. On the relativistic premise that culture "naturally" varies freely across an almost unlimited spectrum, they were prone to draw comparisons expressly to emphasize differences. An example is John Embree's contrast of Japan's "tightly structured" social system against the "loosely structured" social system of Thailand (1950). Many anthropologists today, reviewing Embree's impressionistically selected examples—Thai dance hall girls who might or might not charge a customer, casually fluctuating Thai household obligations—would probably place the behavioral differences along some axis shared by Japan, Thailand, and other societies, such as an axis of urbanization or rational accommodation to differing degrees of economic pressure, rather than merely accept differences as facts not to be pursued further. In the search for systematic determinants of social structure that operate cross-culturally, anthropology and other social sciences have, in short, come closer together in the last two decades.

As a matter of convenience, studies reviewed below have been set into three groups ranging from the more closely circumscribed to the more comprehensive. The former examine one institution or aspect of behavior, the latter seek in grandest scope to interpret society in its entirety. It is worth noting that psychological research appears with anthropological and sociological investigation in the more restrictive category, whereas both psychology and anthropology disappear by the time we reach the grander category.

Comparison of selected institutions and features

An anthropological venture at comparison occurred when, in the course of defining the *oyabun-kobun* institution of traditional Japanese society, Ishino (1953) compared it with the *compadrazgo* of Latin American. Since then we have gained further insight into these relationships and discovered parallel phenomena elsewhere (e.g., Africa [Lloyd 1967:41, 211]), but relations of this kind deserve more attention than they have yet been given.

Sociological comparison of marriage arrangements and marital relation-

ships in Tokyo and Detroit by Robert Blood (1967) was aimed at validating assumptions about general principles of human behavior. The Tokyo sample of 444 couples consisted only of couples living in apartment housing developments (*danchi*) who had married since World War II, and the study was biased to measure the maximum degree of Japanese "Westernization." It can be viewed with equal interest, however, as a comparison that highlights certain important continuities in Japanese male-female relationships.

A U.S.-Japan comparison with psychological implication is Mary Ellen Goodman's study (1957) of school children's responses to two artfully simple queries: "What would you like to be when you grow up?" and "Why?" Her analysis demonstrates pervasive contrasts: whereas American children tend to seek self-fulfillment, Japanese children lean strongly toward a sense of responsibility and service to others (family, the community, the nation, the world). Goodman's study highlights differences. Conversely, a report by Caudill and DeVos (1956) emphasizes the congruences in American middle-class and Japanese values. This study deals not with Japan but with Japanese-American issei and nisei, analyzing their responses to the Murray Thematic Apperception Test and other projective tests. It merits noting, nonetheless, both for its evidence of the extraordinary success of the Japanese accommodation to American society and for its methodology. Most of the challenges raised against the cross-cultural validity of projective tests are bypassed by the simple expedient of treating responses not individually but as a pool of data from which the analysts select recurrent themes.

Before concluding this section, I shall note two brief papers of linguistic nature (Fischer 1964; Passin 1966). Neither is explicitly cross-cultural; the paper by Fischer deals only with interfamilial terms of address and reference as support for inferences about the socially-oriented nature of Japanese attitudes. Passin, however, in taking exception to this evidence, not only adds further examples of Japanese parents addressing each other and their children and vice versa, but also continually draws parallels from (American) English usage to show that the two are closely alike once one takes account of the tone of voice and other situational features in addition to the bare terminology.

Let us attempt to sum up the examples briefly reviewed here, with an eye to future improvement. These papers move in different directions, each in its own orbit and each more or less true to its own premises; they sharpen our perspective or definition of particular Japanese institutional forms. We learn little about social process, and are not given a common framework in which to organize these examples to form a grander picture of Japanese society and culture. Work of this sort may tend to atomize the study of Japan by stretching or wrenching fragments away from the context of the

society as a whole entity. Research of much more modest character which makes a cumulative contribution—for instance, a brief report on how closely Japanese and American high school students coincide in rating the prestige of a standard range of occupations (Ramsey and Smith 1960)—at least lays the groundwork for more ambitious cross-cultural comparisons.

Community comparisons

The studies considered here compare life in or the organization of several rural communities. Very few such studies have been attempted for reasons that will be quickly evident.

Tadashi Fukutake (1967) has compared rural communities in Japan, China, and India. Since his study of each enriched his understanding of the others, and since his presentation implicitly embodies, as an organizing concept, a view of the village as a structural-functional system within the larger national system, his analysis is illuminating. Although we benefit from his personal wisdom, he offers no central issue or concept. We see, for example, that in China and India national power reinforced the authority of those in local positions of power, whereas the power of their Japanese counterparts was not structurally dependent on the outside. We see also the advantage that Japan's unitary inheritance pattern gave in preserving viable farm households while freeing labor for industry. In the end, however, we lose the forest among the trees in this manner of cross-cultural comparison.

Similarly, an elaborately planned study of child-rearing in six societies, one of the six being an Okinawan village, also lacks basic postulates or central issues. This thick volume (Maretzki and Maretzki 1963) illustrates the eccentric nature of anthropology. Six husband-wife teams were given instructions, protocols, and questionnaires to undertake parallel studies of child-rearing and, while doing the research, kept in touch with headquarters at Harvard whence they received supplementary advice. Nevertheless, each team had its own interests and propensities as well as the unique problems of its own cultural setting. So the studies wound up, as usual, as personalized reports on six different child-rearing situations.

A special variant of the question of "heritage vs. environment" underlay a comparison between village social structure of Japan and the Levante (Valencian coastal area) of Spain (Beardsley 1962). The question rising out of Japanese findings was whether ecological factors alone, such as smallholdings and mutual dependence on intensive irrigation, could predispose hamlets toward cohesive neighborhood solidarity even if the heritage of national tradition were not congruent. The test was made in villages of the rice-growing area of Valencia, which are remarkably parallel in local ecology to rural Japanese conditions. These villages, even while voicing the strongly individualist ideology of Spanish tradition, were found to have

markedly collectivist community institutions. This comparison is suggestive but less than fully satisfying; it would have been significantly strengthened by further fieldwork which verified that villages in *non-irrigating* Spanish areas *lack* comparable village-wide mutual institutions, as is reputedly the case.

In summary, these few comparative community studies testify to the efficacy of the community-study approach for a wide range of cross-cultural research problems. As they stand, they contribute data useful for one purpose or another and yet are highly disparate; one can envision integrated and cumulative results from comparative community studies which share some integrative analytic framework. The technique is at hand and well known; what is missing is an issue broad enough and important enough to galvanize a sufficient number of researchers to work on its various aspects.

Nation-nation comparisons

The issue that has galvanized a considerable number of important cross-cultural studies is the interpretation of socioeconomic change that has been transforming Japanese society for the last century. Among scholars of the disciplines primarily under review here—anthropology, psychology, sociology—those who have applied cross-cultural analysis to the grand problems of change in our time are sociologists, and they have worked in a heady atmosphere well above the organizational level of studies considered thus far, comparing nation against nation (Bellah 1958; Bendix 1967; Levy 1955; Moore 1966; Tominaga 1968). An economist whose interpretation is rooted in psychological factors also must be mentioned (Hagen 1962). For an approach complementary to the political concerns of certain sociologists, we should take note of cross-cultural work from political science (Ward and Rustow 1964).

Space available does not permit fair and full consideration of the concerns of each of these contributions. All possess, as an analytic framework, a view of important features of modernization. That is, they recognize the power of transformational forces unleashed in the modern world by an industrial technology coupled with an outlook on social change as a phenomenon to be expected and desired. Marion Levy (1966: 743-744) has said that, whereas in one and one-half millennia Chinese institutions were not "solvent" in Japanese society, in only one century modern social structures initiated in the West have exhibited a decidedly "solvent" property, as they have in other parts of the world. (Parenthetically, we should note Levy's basic premise that the process is one of replication, not "diffusion," of parallel institutions.) This theme unites these studies; otherwise, they diverge considerably. Moore (1966) and Bendix (1967) deal with the clash of social classes and stress differences among nations. Other studies, while accepting and accounting for differences, hypothesize that similar pressures

would tend eventually toward convergence of structure. Bellah (1958) compares Japan with Turkey in religion, Ward and Rustow (1964) with Turkey in political systems, and Tominaga (1968) with Thailand and Levy (1955) with China in differences in initial social structure. Hagen (1962), unlike the others, goes far back in the history of various societies to identify periods of social change which result from the fostering of a need for achievement in "creative personalities"; he goes as far back in Japan as the eighth century.

Prospects

Modernization and its theoretical implications will surely continue to engage the attention of many sociologists; that these matters carry intellectual challenge is evident from the very intensity of disagreement over its dynamics and processes, not only among theorists in sociology but among their political scientist and economist brethren as well. (Some, for instance, deplore the term "modernization" and accept only alternative concepts as viable for the phenomena in question: urbanization, industrialism, development, and so forth.) Anthropologists and psychologists, too, begin to evince positive interest in the subject, but have yet to develop their own theoretical underpinning to guide research; and the question with respect to those who have been preoccupied with Japan is whether they will find ways of returning at all to the cross-cultural research that has been a fruitful vehicle for evolving theory in other disciplines.

My remaining comments deal, very sketchily, with cross-cultural research possibilities bearing on modernization. Let us accept for the moment the view that a national effort to adopt an industrial technology sets in train economic, political, social, and ideological changes; further, that either by requirements inherent in such a technology or by conscious strategy to cope with an industrializing world, the society in question alters in each succeeding generation in specifiable ways. Let us, still further, accept the opinion that detailed empirical study is needed to establish whether the specifiable changes in one society are congruent with or differ from those of other societies. These premises provide the beginning of an analytic framework for cross-cultural research at a scale appropriate to behavioral sciences.

Some current research in Japan and in other areas does actually lead in directions relevant to the testing, verification, and elaboration of modernization theory; it is up to the researchers in each area to turn their work to account by being aware of its bearing on such theory, and by coordinating efforts as an alternative to the difficult, time-consuming task of working in two or more nations. Some coordination between studies of the push-pull factors underlying urban migration in Japan and, say, Thailand, Mexico, or Brazil, between studies of the effect of factory or office wage-work on lifeways and association patterns, and between studies of urban or rural

ghetto-formation in Japan and another nation should not be excessively difficult. Uncoordinated studies of this sort already are being undertaken independently in various nations. When these studies are set in the context of a concept of modernization, their mutual relevance to each other becomes evident; we then see the merit in doing sets of related studies not only in Japan but in one or more nations selected as appropriate vehicles for cross-cultural comparison.

We have tended to examine extremes of the continuum of modernization (what are patterns of life in Japan's "new middle class" of salarymen; or what change has penetrated remote, traditional villages?). We might do well to give attention to phenomena that are prominent during transition, to examine, for instance, whether the institution of cultural broker in self-sufficient villages gives way to interface networks of patrons and protégés linking city to country, market to non-market production systems, or local to national political systems (Ramseyer 1969: Chapter 4). We might also inquire into the system-supportive functions of favors and bribery as modes of bridging the chasm between relatively traditional status-based social systems and relatively modern merit-based social systems. Both psychology and cultural anthropology have a role in investigating the social movements (Aberle 1967) and religious innovations (Hori 1968: 250-251) that give group or individual outlet for frustrations, fears, and dislocations which beset persons trapped in underdeveloped segments of a developing society. The list of subjects amenable to standard methods of fieldwork which also bear on the grand theoretical framework of modernization is readily extended.

The research suggested above can be pursued within Japan itself; comparison between single cultural traits or trait clusters, between institutions, between sub-cultures, or between regions, brings clarification and insight. Comparison between politically distinct societies may also be encouraged because of its special capacity to clarify issues. Cross-cultural investigation can be urged most vigorously, however, when research is focused on issues that bring cumulative results; hence, we do well to consider problems broad enough to encompass a variety of research.

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NOTES

1. By no means all of these comparative works were cross-cultural. Lewis found and included a great variety of intracultural comparisons of before-and-after changes of variants within a culture, and of a culture seen at different points in time. As he properly observed, the merits of comparison within a culture are no less than those of a cross-cultural comparison.

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